



## Make Your Bids More Innovative

*John Brooker & Jeff Parker*

***Fly high.***

***Make your next major bid more innovative, differentiate it from the competition and improve your chance of success.***

Does your company submit many major bids but win few? Does it win, but on low margins?

Does this happen even though you have a structured bidding process in place, meet all the client criteria and produce excellent bid documents? Why does this happen?

At a high level, one reason is that people focus bid management on planning and process; the creative aspects become diluted.

To produce a bid that wins because you have differentiated it from the competition or because you have priced it low, yet still maintained your margins, requires a balance of planning, process and innovative thinking.

This article outlines reasons why bids lack innovative thinking and explains how you can encourage innovative thinking for major bids that merit the resources required.



### Issue 1:

#### YOUR COMPANY HAS NO STRUCTURED APPROACH IN PLACE TO FACILITATE INNOVATIVE THINKING.

While your company might have a structure to move the bid process forward and prepare the bid document, it may well lack a structure to promote innovative thinking.

The words “structure” and “innovative” may seem odd partners. However, many studies (e.g. Basadur) show that if you follow a structured approach to think through a creative challenge, and a bid is very often just that, you will create a more innovative and sustainable solution.

What do we mean by a structured approach? A structured approach is one that has a set of stages, (not to be confused with the Stage Gate Approach), e.g. Explore the Opportunity, Clarify the Opportunity, Create a Proposition, Hone the Proposition, etc.

At each stage, there are steps to **broaden thinking** and generate options, **narrow thinking** to choose the best option and **decide** whether to move on, halt or pause to find information.

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*“Do, do, do,” does not encourage or allow time for creative thinking”*

### Issue 2:

#### THE CLIMATE ON THE BID TEAM DOES NOT FACILITATE INNOVATIVE THINKING.

Bids have factors that create a climate that is not conducive to innovative thinking.

- Often, they are additions to the normal workload, require people to work longer hours and lead to negative stress. This provokes **interpersonal conflict**, **inhibits trust** and can lead to mistakes and blame, which **reduces tolerance to risk**. Taking constructive risk is vital if innovative features are to be included in the bid.
- A stressful environment can cause the team to focus on the bidding process and bid management. “Do, do, do,” does not **encourage or allow time for creative thinking**, **constructive debate or open communication**.

The points in green are dimensions of a creative climate. Without this type of climate on your Bid Team, your bid is less likely to include an innovative component and importantly, your people are less likely to engage with the bid.

### Issue 3:

#### THE BID TEAM USES A NARROW RANGE OF TOOLS TO AID INNOVATIVE THINKING.

Some people are naturally good at innovative thinking. This does not mean they have a monopoly on being innovative. Most people can think innovatively with the right tools. There is a wide range of such tools available but teams often do not know of them or do not apply them. Instead, they fall back on well tried but often abused tools such as brainstorming. When they



get poor results they blame the tool, or lament that they are not creative, when in reality they may have needed a more appropriate tool.

Even if they are creative, people may apply previously known solutions, unnecessary rules, invalid assumptions, fixed mindsets and unwarranted prejudices to bids. Tools exist to overcome these human frailties too. It is a question of knowing and applying them.

#### Issue 4:

##### **INNOVATION HAPPENS IN SILOS.**

Sometimes there is innovation on a bid, but it happens in silos, in single areas, such as engineering. This can lead to the innovative idea being misunderstood or resisted by others, causing conflict, wasted time and frustration.

##### **How Can You Avoid These Issues?**

To avoid or at least minimise the above issues we suggest you do the following:

1. Recognise that it is important to use innovative thinking as part of the bid process and make it a priority.
2. Adopt a standard approach that creates the climate and provides a model and tools to facilitate collaborative and innovative thinking.
3. Run facilitated workshops with all bid contributors to:
  - a. Create the innovative climate, shape the team and build collaboration.
  - b. Explore and validate the bid opportunity and justify to the leadership team that the business is capable of producing an innovative solution.
  - c. Create and hone a compliant, yet innovative solution, shape a strategy to develop it and

foster support. This may need more than one workshop for multiple solutions.

4. Consider running workshops ahead of the tender process if you are bidding on an existing contract that you have. This will provide more time for generating new ideas in a less stressful way and allow you to check the feasibility of your ideas.

#### **The Benefits of An Innovative Approach**

An innovative approach such as we have described:

- Differentiates the offer from the competition and increases the chance of winning
- Helps to identify potential savings in the delivery and support of the contract, thus improving margins. This can be done even post bid
- Can provide solutions that could be used in other contracts or in company operations
- Enables the Bid Manager to recommend a No Go decision to the leadership team early in the bid process if the team finds that the company does not have the capability to win the bid, or cannot provide an innovative solution
- Ensures that the whole Bid Team is involved in developing innovations, thus reducing misunderstanding and conflicts
- Is easily quantified in terms of man-hours and can save valuable man-hours (often not quantified) throughout the bidding process as the whole team understands the innovative ideas.

As with all competition, there is no guarantee that you will win every bid, however, you will maximise your chances of winning and will know that a failed bid was not due to one of the issues mentioned in this article.



## Who We Are

### JOHN BROOKER – BID TEAM FACILITATOR



For thirteen years, John has facilitated workshops with organisations such as Airbus Group, BT, Visa and Unipart to help them align and engage their teams and to think in an innovative way.

He is particularly experienced with multinational and multicultural teams, working regularly throughout Europe, Middle East, Africa and Asia.

John, a former Senior Vice-President of Visa, became interested in bidding when he facilitated workshops to help a US company align a multi-national bid team experiencing the issues we have mentioned.

In 2013, John trained over 200 bid team members in Asia, to help improve their financial knowledge and bidding capability. He is the author of “Innovate to Learn, Don’t Learn to Innovate,” available on Amazon.

### JEFF PARKER – BID TEAM COACH



Jeff is a former Vice President of Airbus Group with many years practical experience of working on Bid Teams and winning high value contracts both in the UK and overseas.

Jeff spent 15 years defining strategy and driving it through Business Development and Sales so that the selection of opportunities on which to bid aligned with business growth and profitability.

He worked closely with Bid Teams, to identify ways to discriminate their proposals against competition, through innovative solutions and development of creative bid presentations for the tendering organisations.

He has a firm belief that bidding can be a creative and constructive process but this requires structure and stimulus for the Bid Team to perform in an innovative environment.

To download a brochure on our Inn8 Bidding Workshop Programme, please visit:

<http://www.yesand.eu/maximise-opportunity/>

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